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SUBJECT: TOURIST NUMBERS DEPRESSED WHILE POACHING OF WILDIFE,
ESPECIALLY ELEPHANTS, WORSENS IN KENYA

REFS: (A) 08 NAIROBI 1971 (B) 08 STATE 84626
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¶1. SUMMARY: Kenya Wildlife Service, Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife, and Ministry of Tourism officials are concerned by a sudden spike in the numbers of elephants, especially in Amboseli and Tsavo East National Parks, apparently poached for their tusks. At the same time, they along with counterparts at the Kenya Tourist Board are dismayed that international tourist arrivals remained sharply down throughout the high season; receipts and arrival numbers were off over 30%. End Summary.

¶2. Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) officials concede that the hoped for jump in international tourist arrivals and receipts did not materialize during the recently concluded high season, which is marked by the annual wildebeest and zebra migration across the Mara River in the Maasai Mara Wildlife Reserve. Rather tourist arrivals, according to the KTB, ended the year down 32% from a historic high of 1,048,738 in 2007 to 710,804. Receipts were also off over 30%. The number of American visitors nosedived from 116,800 to 74,532. German, Italian, and French visitors were noticeably frightened away by the January-February 2008 post-election violence. In 2007 they accounted for 454,000 visitors; in 2008 a mere 100,936. Unsurprisingly, numerous hotels and lodges in Kenya have cut staff. Over 20,000 Kenyans working in the hospitality industry lost their jobs in 2008.

¶3. KWS told consul February 20 that it expects the global financial crisis to have a more significant negative impact on tourism than post-election violence did a year ago. KTB and Ministry of Tourism officials are also worried that 2009 will witness a further decline. That said the Kenyans are not resigned to a bad year. Industry leaders are lobbying the government to reduce its visa entry fee from \$50 to \$25 and provide a visa waiver for children under the age of 16 as ways to spur arrivals. They are also asking KWS to reconsider its recent decision to raise park fees from \$40 to \$60. They have also suggested to the Ministry of Transport to lower the airport landing fee of \$3500 to help reduce ticket prices.

¶4. KWS continues to foster strong relationships with international investors interested in entering Kenya's hotel/tourism sector despite the economic downturn. There are already ongoing projects

at some of the premier animal parks such as Amboseli and Maasai Mara. According to KWS Director Julius Kipng'etich, long-sighted investors view the strong dollar and the established brand name of the country as good opportunities, and so he and KWS remain confident that the tourism industry will rebound within a few years.

15. According to the KWS director, 40% occupancy is the break-even level for parks and hotels to function. KWS believes that domestic demand remains strong. To get through the economic slump, KWS, the Kenya Association of Hotel Keepers and Caterers, and tour operators will cater more to potential homegrown consumers through marketing and more attractive packages with lower prices than they have in the past. They predict resident rates on safari and beach vacation packages will likely decline sharply in April and May to generate more interest among Kenyan tourists. In order to help the tourism industry rebound, Kipng'etich informed consul that KWS and its sister government agencies involved in tourism promotion intend to ratchet up their advertising campaigns targeting the local market. But at present, the sector is in the doldrums.

Elephants under Attack?

16. Adding to the glum news is a just released report, "Elephant Poaching and Ivory Trade in the Amboseli Area," issued by the Amboseli Trust for Elephants, which charges that poaching of elephants in Amboseli, Samburu, and Laikipia by groups rumored to be linked to Chinese buyers has dramatically increased since last summer's CITES decision to allow a one-off sale of legal ivory to China (reftels). The trust claims that 18 elephants were slain in

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Amboseli (home to an estimated 1,550 elephants) and another 80 in Samburu and Laikipia for their tusks. Patrick Omondi, the co-coordinator of KWS's elephant program, confirms that 80 elephants have been killed in the past year. He and KWS concede that poachers killed six elephants in Amboseli in recent weeks, but maintain that the other 12 were victims of human-wildlife conflict and not killed for their tusks. Nevertheless, to stem incidents of cross-border poaching, KWS has joined with the Tanzania Wildlife Division and its Wildlife Research Institute to conduct joint cross-border law enforcement operations.

17. Tsavo East National Park, home to a large number of animals, particularly rhino and elephants, is Kenya's most vulnerable park in terms of poaching due to its proximity to the Somali border. Armed Somali poachers, after walking roughly 500 miles, trespass the park to slaughter both for horns and tusks. Rhino horns sell for a minimum of \$5000 and can fetch upwards of \$12,000 in Dubai and other high-end destinations. Rhino horns range from 3-7 kg per animal. KWS believes that the profits from poaching are likely being used to fund illegal activities. KWS has intelligence and anti-poaching units scattered along the known routes being taken by these Somalis. There have several armed confrontations; one in late May 2007 left three KWS rangers dead and one badly wounded in a firefight with poachers, four of whom were killed.

18. On five separate occasions since mid-2008 Kenyan airport security officers and Customs agents have interdicted Chinese attempting to smuggle raw ivory or finished ivory products out of Kenya. The Kenyan authorities, including KWS officers, are so concerned about the Chinese that they are now screening passengers on all flights to Asia (China in particular) for illegal possession and attempted export of animal products. Notwithstanding the KWS director's assertion that his officers do not "profile," Chinese embassy officials have gone to great lengths to assure Kenyans that Chinese living and working in Kenya are law-abiding and not involved in poaching. Ironically, the Ministry of Tourism and KTB have significantly bolstered their advertising campaigns targeting potential Chinese tourists.

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